

# Champions for foster kids

10-20-12

Volunteer group works to keep youths from falling through system's gaping holes. But state funding dried up, and more help is needed.

## SANDY BANKS



Former high school Principal Elotis McGhee remembers what got her started. It was a graduation day at Locke High in Watts more than a decade ago.

"You represent your child in every way, shape, fashion and form," said McGhee — from arranging medical care for a fragile toddler to finding an algebra tutor for a failing student.

The CASA program has been around for more than 30 years, relying on public funding and private grants to recruit, train and supervise volunteers. But state budget cuts have been shrinking its funding and eliminated the money this year.

Now, said Executive Director Dils Tosteson Garcia, "We have to raise every single dollar we need from private sources."

They managed to raise enough this year to help a record number of children. But Garcia realizes that future fundraising depends on broadening the organization's base of support.

CASA has relied heavily on white, middle-class women as volunteers. But 40% of children in foster care in Los Angeles County are black. So this month, the group held its first recruitment event at Dorsey High in the Crenshaw district,

where thousands of black and Latino students live in group homes or with foster families.

"Do it for yourself, or tell somebody about us," Garcia urged the two dozen people who turned out. "Let them know. These are our children. This is our responsibility."

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"The graduation ceremony was over. I'm leaving school in my car, driving home," she recalled. "Then I see this kid sitting at a bus stop — wearing a cap and gown."

"I thought, 'What kid graduates from high school and doesn't have a single person who comes to the school to celebrate with him?'"

Lots of kids, it turns out. The boy was one of hundreds of Locke High students in foster care — living not with parents or relatives, but in group homes staffed by employees or with families paid to provide for them.

"I thought, 'This is just not fair,'" McGhee said. "They're alone through no fault of their own. They need somebody to advocate for them."

Ten years later, after she retired, McGhee became that somebody — a court-appointed special advocate (CASA), one of 375 volunteers charged with keeping vulnerable children from falling through gaping holes in the foster care system in

Samuel Herod shouldered that responsibility 10 years ago. Herod, 58, grew up in South Los Angeles and still lives there. "I see foster homes on every block in my neighborhood," near 39th and Western, he said.

He said he became an advocate because he "was tired of watching [foster children] leave the system not ready for work, not ready for school, with no one teaching them the things that our parents taught me and you."

His first case involved two brothers, 6 and 7, who'd been parceled out to separate homes. He got them reunited. Then he got them adopted by two sisters who each were willing to adopt one boy, "so they'd grow up together," Herod said.

Now he's guiding six young people, from 17 to 21. Some problems are large, as children try to shake off family legacies of addiction and violence. Others are heartbreakingly small. "I have a girl whose school pictures cost \$39, and nobody would pay for them," Herod said. "The

our responsibility. 'The county says, 'It's not our responsibility.'"

So Herod bought the photos. "Thirty-nine dollars they were arguing over, and they're getting [thousands of dollars] to care for her.... What does that say to a child?"

Herod said being an advocate puts life in perspective. "You can complain, 'I grew up in a single-parent home. Well, how'd you like to grow up with no parents, in 22 different foster homes?'"

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It's not an easy task. Child advocates have to be patient listeners and indefatigable supporters, willing to challenge foster parents, social workers and school officials, and able to find sometimes 15 hours a month to consult with teachers, doctors and lawyers.

McGhee, the retired principal, signed on after she read a column I wrote about foster care two years ago. But volunteering is not the only way to help. You can write a check, or spread the word in your neighborhood, your church, your book club. "We need to shine a light on foster children," McGhee said.

At her schools, "you never saw the foster parents on Back to School Night or at parent-teacher conferences.... When you get a chance to work with these kids, you realize how alone they are."

calling the foster home of student who had been laid for school every morning asked the foster parent for help. "Maybe wake her up earlier or something." A days later, the student came into the office and asked her transfer papers.

She was being moved another home because the foster mother was annoyed by the principal's call.

"I felt terrible about it," McGhee said. "This child was totally on her own in education process."

Her observation made me think of all the phone calls and emails I get while writing about failing schools. "It's the parents' fault," readers tell me.

But in some schools in Los Angeles, one in four students is in foster care living in homes where no one seems to care if they make it to school on time pass their algebra exam, graduation photos. And only a relative handful — of 26,000 foster children — have CASA volunteers looking out for them.

McGhee's new charge a 13-year-old boy, whose teachers tell her he is struggling. "He doesn't call me McGhee admits. But she "monitoring" his algebra grades. "I reach out to him constantly."

He may not appreciate it, she said. "But he knows there's an extra person watching him."

And that's an important message to give a struggling, rootless child.

# L.A. COUNTY JAILS Board's monitoring rights detailed

managers encouraged aggressive tactics and a "deputy-versus-inmate culture" that has been the focus of his operations," Krattli said. "Fortunately, he has indicated his willingness, and publicly so, to embrace the recommendations (of the Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence) and to implement them and to work with an Office of Inspector General."

Krattli said he was not yet ready to opine on whether the board has the leeway to hire someone who is not an attorney to fill the role of Inspector General. That may affect whether the board chooses to set up an Office of Inspector General or an oversight commission. Krattli pointed out that the latter would be subject to Brown Act rules.

Attorneys also still need to work out the details of how deputies' personnel records and inmates' medical and psychiatric records — both considered confidential — would be handled by any new authority.

The board is considering new oversight in the wake of a report by the Citizens' Commission on Jail Violence that the sheriff failed to pay attention to "adverse publicity" forced him to take action, while his senior

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By Elizabeth Marcellino  
City News Service

# Republic registrat worker a

By Joseph Tanfani  
WASHINGTON — A

man who was being paid to register voters by the Republican Party of Virginia was seen dumping eight registration forms into the trash.

Colin Small, 31, was working as a supervisor as part of a registration operation in eight swing states financed by the Republican National Committee. Small, of Phoenixville, Pa., was first hired by Strategic Allied Consulting, a firm that was fired by the party after suspect voter forms surfaced in Florida and other states.

The owner of a store in Harrisonburg, Va., told a local television station that he became suspicious when he saw a car with Pennsylvania plates dump an envelope in back of his store. He recovered the envelope and alerted authorities.

"He made a mistake and he's being charged with it, which we fully support," said Sean Spicer, a spokesman for the Republican National Committee. The committee

## Lottery results

Tonight's Mega Millions  
Estimated jackpot: \$12 million  
Sales close at 7:45 p.m.

For Wednesday, Oct. 17, 2012

Super Lotto Plus  
Mega number is bold  
4-19-25-40-42-Mega 3  
Jackpot: \$10 million

Winners per category:  
No. of winners of prize(s)

|           |        |          |
|-----------|--------|----------|
| 5 + Mega  | 0      | \$16,461 |
| 5         | 3      | \$1,452  |
| 4 + Mega  | 17     | \$104    |
| 4         | 393    | \$60     |
| 3 + Mega  | 617    | \$10     |
| 3         | 16,775 | \$11     |
| 2 + Mega  | 8,618  | \$2      |
| 1 + Mega  | 44,021 | \$1      |
| Mega only | 69,254 |          |

For Thursday, Oct. 18, 2012



REED SAXON ASSOCIATED PRESS

LEE BACA, L.A. County sheriff, is being sued.

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LA-1112

# Lawsuit over bail refusals

[Bail, from AAI]  
the lawsuit.

A Baca spokeswoman said she had not seen the lawsuit and could not comment on its specifics. She disputed the charge that the Sheriff's Department has denied bail to anyone because of ICE holds.

"If you are able to post bail — say it's \$10,000 — and you're an immigrant from wherever — with or without an ICE hold, we accept that," said the spokeswoman, Nicole Nishida.

A report by prison expert James Austin cites data from Baca's office indicating that at least 20,000 Los Angeles County inmates, nearly all of them Latino males, were subjected to ICE holds in 2011.

As many as 17 other counties, including Orange, San Bernardino

"The principle of bail is something so fundamental, that you shouldn't be held until you're found guilty," Pasquarella said.

The dangerous conditions in the nation's largest jail system, which will be overseen by a special monitor after a scathing report by a blue ribbon panel, add "insult to injury" for anyone detained unnecessarily, Pasquarella added.

The Obama administration's deportation policies, which rely on cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities, have come under fire in California. Legislation that would have prohibited sheriffs and police departments from enforcing ICE holds in most cases was vetoed by Gov. Jerry Brown last month.

Denying bail to arrestees would go above and beyond Secure Communities, which requires only that local law enforcement agencies honor the 48-hour ICE holds.

Alain Martinez-Perez, another plaintiff in the ACLU lawsuit, was arrested in December after a domestic dispute. He spent several days behind bars while his cousin's efforts to post bail were rejected because he was under an immigration hold, the lawsuit says.

"People should not be abused in this way," Martinez-Perez, a 37-year-old immigrant from Mexico, said in an interview. "The law should reflect the need to protect all people. We come to America to make better lives, not to be abused and treated differently from others."